

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A customer-configurable plant process observation portal server for collecting plant process information, in accordance with a user designated set of information sources, and for disseminating the information to users via network connections, the portal server  
5 comprising:

an extensible information source registry for storing at least identification information corresponding to an extensible set of plant information sources;

a portal server data interface, accessible via remote networked stations, providing user access to plant information associated with the set of designated plant information sources;

10 and

a portal configuration utility enabling a user to at least designate a new plant information source via a configuration interface, the new plant information source thereafter being added to the extensible set of plant information sources.

15 2. The portal server of claim 1 wherein the portal configuration utility further enables a user to designate a manner in which data from sources of information is visually depicted on a user interface rendered by the portal server for a particular portal site.

20 3. The portal server of claim 1 wherein the portal server comprises at least one association with an Internet portal site from which data received from plant information sources is accessed by users.

25 4. The portal server of claim 1 wherein the portal server comprises at least one association with an intranet portal site from which data received from plant information sources is accessed by users.

30 5. The portal server of claim 1 wherein the portal configuration utility further enables a user to designate a new data handler to be added to an extensible set of data handlers that process information of particular types provided by the extensible set of plant information sources.

6. The portal server of claim 1 wherein the portal configuration utility includes computer program instructions for rendering a configuration template prompting a user to provide information associated with the new plant information source.

5 7. The portal server of claim 6 wherein the configuration template comprises a Web page, and the portal configuration utility is accessible by a browser.

8. A customer-configurable plant process observation portal server for collecting plant process information in accordance with information source designations and for  
10 disseminating the information to users via network connections, the portal server comprising:  
an extensible set of data handlers for processing differing types of data from a set of plant information sources;

a portal server data interface, accessible via remote networked stations, providing user access to plant information associated with the set of plant information sources; and

15 a portal configuration utility enabling a user to designate a new data handler via a configuration interface, the new data handler thereafter being added to the extensible set of data handlers.

9. A customer-configurable plant process observation portal server for collecting  
20 plant process information in accordance with user specified information source designations and for disseminating the information to users via network connections, the portal server comprising:

an extensible information source registry for storing at least identification information corresponding to an extensible set of plant information sources;

25 a user-configurable portal server data interface, accessible via remote networked stations, providing user access to plant information represented in the extensible set of plant information sources; and

a portal data interface configuration utility enabling a user to at least designate, via a configuration interface, a new user interface display element for presenting plant process  
30 information, the new user interface display element thereafter being added to the extensible set of plant information sources.

10. A method for facilitating configuring a customer-configurable plant process observation portal server to collect plant process information in accordance with user-specified information sources, the method comprising the steps of:

creating an extensible information source registry for storing at least identification  
5 information corresponding to an extensible set of plant information sources;

generating a portal server data interface, accessible via remote networked stations,  
providing user access to plant information represented in the extensible set of plant  
information sources; and

providing a portal configuration utility enabling a user to at least designate a new  
10 plant information source via a configuration interface, the new plant information source  
thereafter being added to the extensible set of plant information sources.

11. A method for configuring a plant process observation portal site, supported by  
a portal server, to extend a set of information sources associated with the portal site, the  
15 method comprising the steps of:

accessing, via a browser, a configuration page associated with the portal site;

first specifying, via a graphical user interface, a new source of plant information; and

second specifying, via the graphical user interface, how information associated with  
the new source of plant information is visually rendered on visual displays associated with the  
20 plant process observation portal site.